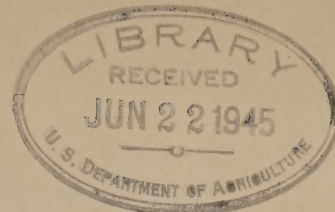


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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Adjustment Administration
Washington, D.C.
August 1940



MIGRATORY LABOR

(This statement was prepared by the Division of Information, A.A.A., to be filed with the Special Committee of the House, investigating the migratory labor problems).

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The Bureau of Agricultural Economics, in a study dated May 11, 1940, mentions some of the principal causes of migration, after making it clear that on one factor alone is sufficient to explain the phenomenon.

An examination of the various factors listed by BAE suggests that there may be an underlying pattern to the migratory problem, a basic "cause" of the immediate causes.

1. The seasonal nature of agriculture. Certain crops, such as cotton, sugar beets, fruits, and vegetables, require a great many farm hands in peak seasons that are not needed at all in slack seasons. But the seasonal nature of agriculture does not explain why there is a whole army of migrants for every handful of jobs.

2. Size of farms. Most operators of large-scale farms find it cheaper to use day-laborers for seasonal peaks rather than keep hired men on the job all year around. This makes for mobility among hired hands, but again it does not explain why the number of migrants should run up to 2 million annually.

3. Lower labor needs. Tractors, trucks and automobiles have eliminated the need for an estimated 345,000 agricultural workers. If the trend of the past decade is continued for the next ten years, it is expected that an additional 350,000 to 400,000 workers in agriculture will be displaced by mechanization. Improved farm practices--better seed, better breeding of stock, etc.--also reduce the need for labor on the farm. In 1939, through greater efficiency, farmers supplied an abundance of food and fibre with 602,000 fewer farm workers than in 1930.

Mechanization and more efficient farm practices account for a large part of the surplus of farm workers in the United States. Nevertheless, agriculture has increased its efficiency from the beginning and had also made rapid progress in mechanization long before the migratory problem became the national issue that it was in the depression. So mechanization is by no means the basic cause of the destitution among families wandering about the countryside looking for odd jobs.

4. Decline in foreign markets. About 63,881,000 acres were required to produce the principal export crops in 1920-21 but only 17,770,000 in 1934-35. Indications are that this year's agricultural exports will require even fewer acres. The loss of foreign trade, of course, means displacing farmers as well as the acreage devoted to export crops.

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5. Increased rural farm population. The birth rate in farm areas is higher than in the cities. The rate is highest on poor land, among farm families with the lowest standard of living. It is higher in the South than in any other region. Thus the farm, particularly the low income farm of the South, is the nation's greatest supplier of people. In the 1920's the net migration from farm to city was about 6 million, but it began to slow up in 1927 and declined swiftly after 1929 until in 1932 there were actually more people moving to the farm than from it. The net farm-to-city migration was resumed at a lower rate thereafter, ending up with 2,179,000 for the decade of the 1930's. It is highly significant that the farm-to-city movement was almost 4 million less in the 1930's than in each of the two preceding decades. The piling up of people on the farm has increased the human pressure on the land. As a result many families are bound to be pushed into the stream of migrants seeking stray jobs.

6. Drought. Long rainless periods in 1934 and 1936 drove thousands of families from their dust-covered farms. A border count of persons entering California looking for work during the four years ending in the middle of 1939 showed that over half (51.3 percent) came from the Great Plains States, and more than one out of five (22.7 percent) came from Oklahoma alone. Drought and dust storms hastened and no doubt intensified migration from abandoned farms.

7. Erosion. About 100 million acres of cropland have been ruined or nearly ruined, another 100 million acres severely damaged, and an additional 100 million acres seriously harmed by erosion. All too often farm families have to abandon their land and join the migrant army because their soil is too exhausted to give them a living.

These seven factors contributing to migrancy fall into three groups. The seasonal nature of agriculture causes a demand for farm labor in peak seasons only. Large-scale farming, mechanization and improved practices, the decline in foreign markets, and the high birth rate on farms increase the pressure of an excessive number of folks trying to make a living on the land. Drought and erosion drive families off the farm.

Another factor facilitating migrancy is the rapid development of transportation and the improvement of highways in the past generation. Automobiles are so plentiful that almost any family with \$25 to \$50 has a way of moving from place to place.

It might be added that misleading advertising, in the absence of adequate employment information, lures hundreds of thousands of families to places where they have no chance to make a living.

Noteworthy about these factors which contribute to migrancy is that all of them taken together do not add up to the size of the problem that has confronted the nation ever since 1929. Every one of the contributing factors was in operation long before the migrancy crisis of the past decade.

The deep underlying cause of migrancy is the same historic force which is behind the paradox of millions of unemployed and lack of sufficient income for two-thirds of the nation's families in the midst of boundless resources and

billions of dollars seeking productive use.

In days gone by there was plenty of land for everybody, land free for the asking, land so rich that it was wasted without heed for the future. If a farmer wore out his soil in one place, he could move to another. If a worker got crowded out of his job in the East, he could move to the West. There were plenty of jobs for everyone who wanted to work and plenty of opportunities for all the young folks coming up in the world.

The depression beginning in 1929 marked a change in the pattern of the national economy. Drastic adjustments had to be made because Westward expansion was ended, the effects of the war and the speculative boom afterwards had run their course, the exhaustion of soil had become a national peril, millions of able-bodied men and boys had no jobs, and billions of dollars could find no profitable outlet for investment.

Directly or indirectly, all wealth comes from the earth. As long as there was free land, the nation could live in luxury by squandering the riches that nature had saved up for thousands of years. But now that the treasury in the soil is running low, the nation is forced to adopt a new budget, a budget calling for public action to save the land and to save the people who can no longer get a decent living, directly or indirectly, from the land.

The migratory crisis is one of many problems arising from this transformation in America. When people are driven off the land by large scale farming, by mechanization, by the loss of foreign trade, by the high birth rate in rural areas, or by drought and erosion, they have no place to go. Formerly rural youth could swarm into the cities and find jobs. Today the farm population is backed up on the land, exerting a terrific pressure on soil that is being depleted faster than it is being restored.

So we have the familiar trend from independent farm ownership to foreclosure, tenancy, share-cropping, day labor at impossibly low wages, or abandonment of agriculture altogether. From this tragic process comes an endless swarm of migrants.

Migrancy is a national problem. It is national in its cause and it must be national in its cure.

So far as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration is concerned, efforts are being concentrated on the source of migrancy.

Migrants come from eroded land, and the Agricultural Conservation Program is improving the soil on about 82 percent of the nation's cropland.

Migrants come from low-income areas, and the AAA is boosting farm income through parity payments, price protection, stabilization of supplies, commodity loans, and crop insurance in the Ever-Normal Granary.

Triple-A payments to small farmers are proportionately larger than to large farmers.

Under the 1938 Agricultural Conservation Program 93 percent of the participating farmers received payments under \$200. The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 set up the following schedule to increase payments of less than \$200:

<u>Payment earned</u>	<u>Amount of increase</u>
\$20 or less	40 percent
\$21 to \$40	\$8 plus 20 percent of amount over \$20
\$41 to \$60	\$12 plus 10 percent of amount over \$40
\$61 to \$186	\$14
\$186 to \$200	Enough to increase payment to \$200

In addition, the Agricultural Conservation Program has made it possible for any farmer to earn at least \$20 for complying with special crop acreage allotments and for carrying out soil-building practices. If the largest amount a farmer may earn through compliance with acreage allotments is less than \$20, the amount which he may earn for carrying out soil-building practices will be increased so that his total payment may be at least \$20.

The Agricultural Adjustment Act also makes specific provision to prevent the needless displacement of tenant farmers and share-croppers. Landlords are not allowed to receive increased payments by unjustifiably cutting down the number of tenants or discriminating against them. Any reduction in the number of tenants below the average of the preceding three years or any change in the relationship between the landlord and tenants or sharecroppers tending to increase the landlord's payments is prohibited unless the local AAA committee after an investigation approves the change as necessary and justifiable. An amendment to the Act, approved May 14, 1940, places the burden of proof upon the landlord.

In the long run the best protection for tenants, sharecroppers, and small farmers is the democracy of the AAA program. Every participating farmer has an equal right to vote for the committeemen who carry out the farm program locally. They are definitely responsible for suggesting improvements in the operation of the program in case any existing provisions are not air-tight.

The machinery of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration is available at all times to help prevent the evils of migratory farm labor.

Under the 1935 Agricultural Conservation Program 50 percent of the participating farmers received payments under 1935. The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 set up the following schedule for farmers payments of less than \$5000

Amount of Payment	Percentage
\$50 or less	50 percent
\$51 to \$100	40 percent
\$101 to \$500	30 percent
\$501 to \$1000	20 percent
\$1001 to \$5000	10 percent

In addition, the Agricultural Conservation Program has made it possible for any farmer to earn at least 75 percent of his normal crop average. The program has been carrying out soil-conserving measures. It has helped to build a better way of using our land with careful attention to the soil. The amount which is now paid for carrying out soil-conserving measures will be increased so that the total payment may be at least 75%.

The Agricultural Adjustment Act also makes specific provision to protect the economic adjustment of tenant farmers and share-croppers. Landlords are not allowed to receive increased payments for agricultural land which the tenant or farmer or share-cropper occupies. The Act provides in the matter of tenants that the average of the payments shall be at least 75 percent of the average of the payments for the preceding three years or any change in the relationship between the landlord and tenant or share-cropper resulting from the landlord's payment to the tenant or share-cropper. The Act also provides that the landlord's payment to the tenant or share-cropper shall be at least 75 percent of the average of the payments for the preceding three years or any change in the relationship between the landlord and tenant or share-cropper. The Act also provides that the landlord's payment to the tenant or share-cropper shall be at least 75 percent of the average of the payments for the preceding three years or any change in the relationship between the landlord and tenant or share-cropper.

In the long run the best protection for tenants, share-croppers, and small farmers is the economy of the AAA program. Every participating farmer has an equal right to vote for the committee which carry out the program locally. They are definitely responsible for making improvements in the operation of the program in each and every provision and are the right.

The economy of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration is available at all times to help protect the value of existing farm labor.